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The Art Gallery

SOME MASTERPIECES OF ART.

I.



MERSON says that the word of ambition of the present day is Culture. To help to attain that culture in a certain direction is the aim of THE ART AMATEUR, and in presenting a series of papers on the subject chosen, the plan of the writer can be best defined in the words used by the editor in his initial number: "The great

point of difference between our proposed treatment of matters of art and their treatment by the professed art periodicals may be formulated thus: Our contemporaries generally assume in advance that the reader knows every thing of the technicalities and the philosophy of the topics on which they treat. THE ART AMATEUR prefers to assume that the average reader knows nothing of these things, and from that safe starting-point it will endeavor to instruct him." Taking for granted, therefore, that these words are directed to art amateurs, and not to art students, who know perfectly well where to find all they desire to know on this point, and who also are fully aware that no popular article can satisfactorily explain the height, the depth and scope of the subject, my aim shall be to tell amateurs what is most desirable to know to make them familiar with the beautiful objects which for centuries have gladdened the eyes and the hearts of all lovers of the beautiful, to give them the information which they so often seek in vain, or at times dread to seek, fearing to expose an ignorance for which they are not to blame, but which, alas! is often treated as if it were blameworthy.

No strict chronological order will be followed, but the works will be taken up according to their popularity, or the frequency with which they are met in galleries, shop-windows, museums or drawing-rooms.

Fig. 1. represents the well known and frequently met statue of Venus or Aphrodite of Melos. This magnificent but mutilated statue belongs to the period when Greek sculptors had forsaken the archaic and conventional types and begun to depict emotions of the soul in the expression of the gods, which hitherto had been types of superhuman placidity. This change of style places the period of the statue after the Peloponnesian Wars, 404-431 B.C.



FIG. 1.—VENUS OF MELOS.

It was discovered on the island of Melos in the eighteenth century, while excavations were being made. It became the property of the French government, and is now one of the greatest treasures of the Louvre Gallery in Paris. Both arms are missing, and the greatest modern sculptors have been experimenting in vain to restore them in such a way as to make the position a natural one. Some have suggested she held the polished shield of Mars, and was looking at her reflection; others that her arms were raised to her head, or that she was holding the Apple of Discord. A member of the Stockholm Academy, Herr Geskel Salomon, has recently published an elaborate and richly-illustrated monograph, in which he en-

deavors to show that this celebrated statue neither stood by itself nor formed part of a group of two figures, but rather that it belongs to a group of three figures, of which the centre was Herakles, who stood between the goddesses of Pleasure and Virtue, after the fable of Prodikos. The figure accepted as Venus represents, according to this latest hypothesis, Pleasure or Desire.

Several rumors have been started at various times purporting that the arms had been found, but they have never received confirmation. The statue bears many marks and dents showing hard usage, and some of these were certainly occasioned when it was hoisted on



FIG. 2.—NIOBE AND CHILD.

board the vessel which conveyed it to France, as the shipment was hurriedly made in order to obtain possession of the treasure before its merits became too generally known. It is of heroic height—over seven feet—of magnificent and harmonious proportions. The expression is noble, almost sublime, and lifts one far above all petty and frivolous thoughts. She is not the Venus of earthly love, but the heavenly Venus Urania—in other words, the Goddess of Love refined from sensuality. One cannot but reverence the genius that could breathe so much life and grace into the inanimate marble, that could give such expression to inert material that nothing but breath seems wanting. The figure seems possessed in common with all great and truly beautiful works of sculpture of the permanent inward joy and loveliness which cast an everlasting sunshine and beauty around—that radiance of immortal life which breathes eternal happiness. The statue is undraped to the hips, the left foot is slightly raised by resting on a stone which throws the body somewhat towards the right



FIG. 2 a.—NIOBE.

side, the head is erect, the glance directed far over the beholder's head. It is reproduced in marble, bronze, plaster, etc., but all casts less than two feet high lose the peculiar quality of the original, which is grandeur in repose. Fig. 2 represents the afflicted Niobe, who, for her presumption in daring to exalt herself above Latona, had to witness the destruction of her seven children by the arrows of Apollo and Diana. This group is one of the most beautiful exhibitions of ancient art, and the expression on the face of the bereaved mother, who is endeavoring in vain to shield her youngest daughter from the shafts of the angry gods, can well bear out the Shakespearean quotation, "Like Niobe, all tears;" for the legend goes on to say that after her children's death she wept so incessantly that she was metamorphosed into a fountain, thus making the mother's grief and sorrow eternal.

The fourteen statues joining the group were dug up in 1583 near the Lateran Gate in Rome. They were

bought by the Medici family and conveyed to Florence, in 1777, and after being restored were placed in a saloon of the Uffizi Gallery. The group is supposed to be the one described by Pliny, and even in his time the author was not known, although he attributed it to Scopas, which is also the opinion of the great modern

German art critic Winckelmann.

The generally received opinion is that the group formed the ornament of the front of some ancient temple, as the size and posture agree with the pyramidal arrangement necessary for a pediment, some of the figures being represented stretched on the ground in attitudes of agony or death, others raised on their knees, the whole culminating in the



FIG. 3.—DIANE CHASSERESSE.

standing figure of Niobe. Another proof of this intention is found in the imperfect finish of the back of most of these statues, which shows that the artist thought only of the effect produced by a front view.

Fig. 3 represents the statue known as "Diane Chasseresse," now in the Louvre Gallery in Paris. Diana was represented in the early period of Greek sculpture in severer costume, and it was Praxiteles who first attempted to subvert the rules of conventionality and represent her as the lightly-clad goddess of the chase. This figure generally forms the companion-piece to the Apollo Belvedere (so called from the part of the Vatican where it stands), and while the latter represents Apollo after the flight of the fatal shaft, Diana is supposed to be marching along in full pursuit of her victim.

Fig. 4 gives us a representation of the Greek idea of power in repose. The Farnese Hercules is colossal in size, the work of an Athenian named Glykon. It was found in the Baths of Caracalla at Rome.

Some of our American artists have been singularly fortunate at the great London exhibitions this year.

The marine painter, W. T. Richards, of Philadelphia, for instance, writes that his two large (36 x 54) pictures, which he sent to the Royal Academy, without much confidence, were both hung on the line and sold during the first week for £400 each. He also sold all of his water-colors and drawings exhibited at the Dudley Gallery. He says that he is being treated so well that he means to stay in England

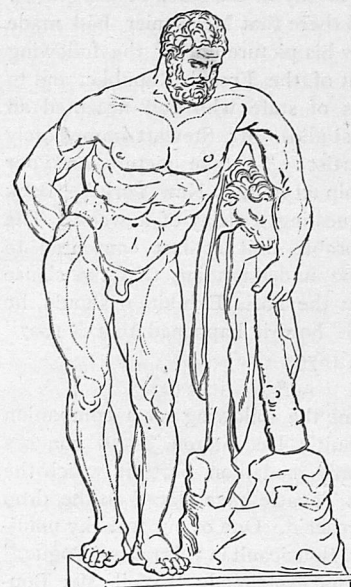


FIG. 4.—THE FARNESSE HERCULES.

for a year or two longer. Mr. Richards has well earned his good fortune. One of his best works, "The Vasty Deep," is on exhibition at Moore's rooms in this city. It is difficult to imagine how the sublime grandeur of the ocean could be more impressively portrayed on canvas than we find it in this picture.